

- "1) That no underground requires the permanent presence of European staffs;
- 2) That only one of them is commanded by a native officer; and
- 3) That instead of 30 undergrounds with 17 in position, it should read:
5 undergrounds with only 1 of them commanded on the spot by a native."

"All the others

--Either are only villages able to mount very limited self-defense;
--Or are really former armed groups to be totally taken back as far as this may be desirable and possible."

Reading these observations confirmed what I had felt during my short visit to Paris: the complete misunderstanding of the situation in Indochina and of the possibilities which we had there.

Paris did not grant the name of underground except to those which had 100 men commanded by an officer and four noncommissioned officers. Giving such specific directives on the conduct of the activities in a theater of operations in perpetual evolution, through men who had made only short appearances in the country several years before, was not realistic.

By strictly applying these directives, even using all of the officers and noncommissioned officers in the undergrounds, the GCMA would never have been able to exceed the number of 7,500 underground fighters, although it already numbered 20,000, and we envisaged with the Commander-in-Chief, the General, the possibility of attaining the number of 60,000 by the end of 1954.

Actually our constant policy was to leave maximum responsibility to the natives, on the condition that we give them sufficient technical training.

I was reproached for the fact that, out of a total of 80 officers working in the GCMA, only 23 were in operation in the field, for example, the Na San underground managed by Captain Hebert, headquartered at Hanoi.

They proposed to me: "Relief of the different command echelons (general staff or regional representation) according to a joint table of organization."

I showed these observations to Colonel Fleurant, responsible to the General for making sure of communication between the general staff and the special services. He counseled me to consider them as void, and as not having arrived, and not to answer them. I replied officially to correct the grossest errors, particularly those concerning Captain Ebert, whose capital role we saw in August in the evacuation of Na San. The word "headquartered" with respect to him did not really correspond to reality.

Before the last Viet attacks the undergrounds which he directed had three Beaver airstrips. In view of the ground relief, there was no other possible means of communication between these various strips. Therefore the most rapid way to go from one strip to another was the airplane. We did not have any helicopters available.

On the other hand the maintenance of the underground (clothing, armament, food, ammunition) required monthly parachuting of 100 tons into the most varied points. Quite often only the underground leader knew of them and had the responsibility of recovering them. Under these conditions it was difficult to conceive of a fixed command post set up in the underground.

This misunderstanding with Paris, momentarily inconsequential because of the confidence which the Commander-in-Chief had in the GCMA, was going to have serious repercussions. The first was that the SDECE Colonel Delegate, with whom I had established certain bonds of friendship during the previous tour, would no longer support me in order to remain loyal to Paris.

In order for the GCMA to become more independent of the TAPI, the control of the EMO-EAP was taken from them on the request of General Gilles. While this management had contributed valuable help in starting the GCMA, the latter had

resources which enabled it to do without this help. In order for the separation to be clearer, the GCMA would change its name, beginning on 1 December 1953.

From now on it would be called the Composite Intervention Group: GMI. Apparently this change in name would have no importance. Actually it was of very great importance, which was to appear soon: the GCMA, the Composite Airborne Commando Group, was an airborne unit according to its name alone, in which all of the certified parachute personnel had a right to flight pay.

The GMI was no longer an airborne unit. I managed with some difficulty to continue getting this pay for the personnel who had already belonged to TAPI, but I got a formal rejection for the others who very often parachuted under difficult conditions. It is never pleasant to tell subordinates that a perfectly deserved benefit has been taken from them without any valid reason. On 20 February 1954, I wrote a long letter to Morlane:

"I am taking advantage of the departure of Jostain (who had just left the South Laos antenna) to quickly send you this letter.

"In a few days you will receive by official transmission the joint report on the subject of the repercussions suffered by the GMI through its separation from TAPI.

"The TAPI give evidence of the worst will, and this has no origin other than a base jealousy against our shop, which is holding its own everywhere and extending.

"On the other hand General Gilles who, like any upper-level leader, wants to have control over everything, is raging to see that the GMI, the importance of which he has grasped, is escaping from him. Fortunately this team is reaching the end of its tour and will return. This period of transitional adaptation will pass quickly with the arrival of Colonel Sauvagnac.

"In the joint report I have explained all of my concerns. Actually everything revolves around the flight pay which the TAPI would be very happy to see taken from

me; the EMIFT (Ground Forces Inter-Army General Staff), like all the men who do not jump, are not doing anything to give me satisfaction.

"What you have to get for me in France is that: 1. All of the GMI people who are certified paratroopers, whether they are in the TAP or not, get flight pay like the TAP personnel if they make their regulation jumps;

"2. That all of the active specialists coming from France and certified as paratroopers, in particular those who have already served in the GMI or those of the 11th Shock group be assigned to me. Currently people coming from the 11th Shock group or former GCMA people are not assigned to me on the pretext that I have reached my quota of parachutists.

"3. We are counting on you over there.

"You must have received my quarterly report.

"First I have been disappointed, because none of the recipients has spoken to me about it. It took a month to reach General Navarra. But as soon as he learned of it, the result was clear: everything that I asked for was given to me:

"Credits for 30 supplementary auxiliary companies;

"Ten officers and 20 noncommissioned officers more, which will bring my table of organization to 83 officers plus two native officers, and 214 noncommissioned officers.

"I have set up a very detailed plan for using these new resources.

"The shop is now in a stable state. It counts, and will count more and more. In a short time we will be one of the most important trumps of the Commander-in-Chief.

"Finally I'm astonished that you have not replied to my last two personal letters on the subject of my request to come here after a furlough the length of which is to be determined. As a matter of fact my normal tour is ending in May. Therefore it is necessary for me and for the GMI for me to be fixed. The personnel established by Grall and me, all of the valuable former people, are going to return.

These are the brains which must be replaced. New ones must be chosen if things are to continue. The ones we are receiving these days are only stopgaps. In my former 2nd TCCP team I have a whole mine of people who would easily adapt and who would certainly come if I asked them. Most have just returned from AOF (expansion unknown). But to contact them it would be necessary for me to be assured of returning myself.

"Colonel B. has told me that my extension would not pose any problems. But I have not found his statement to be sufficient."

Colonel Morlane answered me on 4 March. Certainly he was going to see to all of the materiel problems which I had submitted to him. With respect to me personally, this is what he wrote me:

"You still have a lot of irons in the fire, but I must confide to you that in spite of the magnificent successes brought to the EMIFT offices, the GMI growth makes me a little dizzy, just as the organization of intelligence research gives me some concern.

"Among the problems of relief, the most important obviously is the choice of a new leader. You have found a splendid solution which, according to what you tell me, has gotten all approval, but maybe you are right to mistrust certain ones.

"You are just finishing a very long and very brilliant tour in Indochina. It is a very hard profession, where not only one's physical resistance is consumed, but also his credit. A moment comes when the baton has to be passed to someone else. I am afraid you are interested in remaining at the head of the GMI after May, without realizing that the interim during your furlough risks causing catastrophe. The question seems to be envisaged from this viewpoint in Saigon, where the names of possible successors have already been proposed.

"Hoping that you will be grateful for my candidness...."

I must say that this letter did not surprise me so much. Now that the GMI had reached a certain state of expansion, I knew that there would be no shortage of very superior officers to envy my replacement, especially since I was reaching the end of the normal tour. I also knew that SDECE in Paris was only waiting for the end of my tour to get rid of me, because I was gradually getting too important a place, which worried them, and because the methods which we were using were designated as deviationist. However, I wanted to be sure of this; that is why I had posed the question to Morlane so clearly.

Some of the GMI officers returning to France at the end of their tour were assigned to the Paris SDECE. Through personal letters they informed their friends or me about the state of morale reigning in the "motherhouse". One of the most characteristic on this subject is from Lt. Bole du Chaumont. He had commanded the Lai Chau antenna for two years, and knew our problems very well. Here are the principal passages:

"I have perceived a very clear orientation preparing for a break between the Special Services and the GMI. In feeling out the lay of the land, I learned that the work, which is that of Major Trinquier, is deviationist! And that it would be good to attach the GMI to the EMIFT. I do not think differently, and the more so because the General-in-Chief is the one who provides us with materiel and personnel.

"But what will surprise you is the fact that when the Special Services want to perform some real action, inevitably they follow the old European methods which are invalid in the Far East. They think something better could be done. Unfortunately they cannot speak from recent personal experience.

"Good-bye, my old friend, all my friendship. Give my respects to the Leader and Major Bonnigal, as well as to our comrades.

Bole."

A number of times I myself had suggested cutting all bonds between the GMI and the SDECE, which contributed practically nothing to us except partisan and unfounded criticism. But I had not insisted; the break with the TAP had already created problems for us. The best thing in the end was to get the best we could from the current situation.

General Navarre had discreetly had me ask if I intended to extend my tour. Actually when I left most of the important GMI staffs would be sent back to France, which would cause irreparable gaps capable of leading to disaster in such a special unit covering the entire Indochinese territory and various activities. That is why he had asked me to remain somewhat longer and to anticipate quite in advance replacements to important positions, staggering them if possible.

Before replying to the General, I wanted to know the opinion of SDECE on whom I depended to a certain degree. It was now a closed matter. Therefore I informed him (General Navarre ?) of Morlane's response. He was very surprised by it.

"Here I am the Commander-in-Chief", he said to me. "We are about to begin a difficult period. This is not the time to change teams, especially the ones which are going well. In view of the mission which you have undertaken, I absolutely insist on keeping you.

"You have asked me for personal reasons to stay until the end of June. This partial extension I can grant you myself. The service record will leave immediately.

"Then make your regular request for an extension of one year, which I shall forward with a demand that it be met, no matter what SDECE thinks."

Indeed it was, despite opposition from Paris, with which my relations would not be improved.

Everything continued systematically, despite these difficulties which, fundamentally, concerned only me and which most of the staff did not know of.

All of the training centers were operating at full capacity. The Cape Saint-Jacques Center, under the direction of Captain Fradere-Niquet, had developed a perfect program for the training of native underground officers.

Dien Bien Phu

On 8 December General Gilles surrendered the Command of the entrenched Camp of Dien Bien Phu. He was replaced by Col. de Castries. The decision to remain at Dien Bien Phu had been definitively made. -

The entrenched camp at Na San had been a stroke of genius on the part General Salan. After the fall of Nghia Lo (17 October), Na San had been the rallying point for units pursued by the victorious Viet divisions and for the posts on the central part of the Black River, which risked being overrun. Na San was an absolute necessity imposed by a dramatic situation.

General Gilles organized the defense with hastily received reinforcements. Everyone, troops, noncommissioned officers and officers, worked nonstop, day and night, to dig in and organize in order to be able to mount effective resistance against the Viet assault expected from one day to the next. They had only 40 days to organize the entrenched camp.

The assault came on 29 November. Until 2 December the Viet divisions hammered away at the camp. Not having anticipated a long siege and having suffered severe losses (estimated at 7,000 men), the Viets withdrew on the morning of 3 December to lick their wounds, leaving only weak elements in contact.

From then on our Mobile Groups were able to make deep sorties in all directions without running into opposition. It was during these sorties that Hebert had recruited his first partisans.

At the beginning of December Hebert rejoined Dien Bien Phu. About a hundred Meos, rescued from the undergrounds, eventually joined him to try to repeat the Na San experience.

But neither the conditions nor the atmosphere were the same. Na San had been set up under the threat of an immediate assault. Dien Bien Phu began with a victory: the annihilation of a Viet battalion. Certainly elements of the 316th had come into

contact rapidly and obstructed the retreat of the Lai Chau troops. But they were not an immediate danger to the entrenched camp under organization. The dispersed Viet divisions would first have to regroup.

From then on the Viet would install around the basin a powerful defensive system which would permit them to regroup all of their security forces, to bring in the material necessary for the final assault, and to prevent any attempt to leave the garrison.

Every entrenched camp has a major defect: it is spread like an open book before the eyes of the enemy, who can study its means of defense and their value. Since it is difficult to reinforce them or to modify them greatly once they are in place, the enemy can methodically calculate the means required and the battle procedures best adapted for taking it. It is only when these conditions have been met that he can proceed to the attack with every chance of success.

This is what happened at Dien Bien Phu.

In addition the success of Na San, although certainly difficult, inspired a certain euphoria. Supplementary resources had been given to Dien Bien Phu: tanks, aircraft, and a heavy artillery capable of firing back. The entire garrison was certain that an attack on the basin would be repulsed as at Na San the year before.

For this reason Dien Bien Phu was not organized with the same fervor and the same fear of immediate danger as at Na San. Most of the shelters and the command posts could not withstand the 105 shells. Our first frustrations came from the fact that the command posts, spotted long before, were the first targets of the Viet artillery, and that the disappearance of many staffs made the conduct of the battle very difficult right from the beginning.

Thus the Viet divisions without any major difficulty were able to take a position around the stronghold and systematically prepare its siege with just as much precision and methodology as in the time of Vauban.

land was absolutely impossible from 1 January 1966 on.

This is the formal proof that any retreat of the Dien Bien Phu garrison by the enemy ceasing all activity when the lost position was integrally cut off."

units escaped complete destruction only because the communications stopped, with were sometimes attained, it was impossible to maintain them. Most of the time the joined immediately, making artillery or air support impossible. While objectives murderous bullets and grenades close to ground level. Hand-to-hand combat was launched close range invisible maneuvers not indicated by any clearing, firing discipline was total. The enemy always had the initiative in opening fire, denied zeal. Its positions were admirably camouflaged in the jungle and fire "The Viet infantry proved its well-known qualities and fought with unprec-

produced more and more violent engagements.... All were bloody failures...."

"Some days later the basin had been perfectly encircled, and every contact

Further on Colonel Langlais wrote:

Viet had said "halt", they did not advance another inch."

batteries, decimated and horribly mangled by the violence of the combat. When the My collection mission finished fortunately with a night retreat of the two to their rescue by Colonel de Castries with a third battalion and two 105 batteries foot through the flaming jungle at the cost of very heavy losses. I had been sent "Attacked by unprecedented zeal by units of the 312th, they retreated foot by meters north of the camp toward the village of Muong Fon:

Battalion) and the 1st BFF (Foreign Parachute Battalion), engaged heavily 15 kilo-

Dien Phu", the sortie of two parachute battalions, the 5th BVM (Vietnam Parachute Colonel Langlais, who was the soul of the defense, relates in his book, "Dien

any troop element trying to leave to give the entrenched camp a brief respite.

With their material intact and on solidly prepared positions they waited for

It is quite obvious that, if our best battalions could not succeed in breaking the Viet vise which surrounded the entrenched camp, it was difficult for Hahert and his Meos to reestablish contact with the populations outside of the stronghold.

In addition the sharp battles which the 316th had conducted against our underground to open RP 41 and the Song Ma Valley, had forced the Viets to establish a significant organization to assure protection of its vital communication lines.

The extraordinary density of the Viet Minh occupation around Dien Bien Phu had reduced our influence to zero for a radius of 50 kilometers. Not only had the people been neutralized, but they had been militarily organized and subjected against their will to the Viets, who used them like convicts for their hardest work, and particularly to transport rations and materiel. In this region we no longer had any possibility of getting them back under our control by our customary procedures.

However, everyone was certain that Dien Bien Phu would hold and that it would completely fulfill its assigned role: to bar the route from Laos, but also to immobilize most of the Viet battle corps and destroy it if it should try to assault the entrenched camp. Thus, the role which had initially fallen upon us in this region passed, because of the change in orientation, to the regular troops engaged in a classic battle.

The organization of undergrounds would continue, although far from Dien Bien Phu, in the areas where the insufficiently organized Viet political and military hold allowed us to.

We are going to make a brief summary of the underground action in the other regions where they operated.

The Caradmore underground, after having taken possession of Than Uyen, had reached the edge of Nghia Lo; but Nghia Lo was held very firmly, because of the importance which its location on RP 41 represented for the enemy. Its means of defense were beyond the power of our underground fighters.

In the north Chapa had been retaken and firmly held. The underground fighters blocked Lao Kay and, throughout the siege, prevented the departure of troops from this locality to Dien Bien Phu. The few attempts made by the Viers failed. The Maes, used as porters in the convoys, rejoined our undergrounds after the destruction of the army escort accompanying them.

Our men harassed RP 41 east of Nghia Lo with their meager resources. What harm some small elements of the 8th BCCP could have caused over this large area, maneuvering within the undergrounds with complete security, and how easy it would have been to recover them later on the Than Uyen airstrip!

On 1 April 1954 I decided to visit them and landed on the Beaver airstrip prepared by the underground fighters in the valley south of Chapa. My loyal pilot, Lantal, who had gone to France for a month, was replaced by an unknown pilot who had arrived in Indochina about a week before. Putting his faith in maps which he had seen before leaving France, he believed that the Delta was completely pacified and wanted to fly low over it. I had my hands full trying to make him increase altitude to avoid a FM burst, always possible here. On the other hand the mountains frightened him. He thought that they were completely held by the Viet Minh. Now, at this time, on the right bank of the Red River we were holding a strip of land more than 100 kilometers long and 50 kilometers wide. The Beaver airstrip had not been prepared particularly well, nor was my pilot very experienced. I don't know how he managed it, but we left the tail fins on a rock which bordered this strip. At the strip a company of partisans in impeccable uniform, commanded by their chief, an old Chau Doan¹, presented arms. But because of the accident, our Beaver was no longer able to take off. It took three days before another airplane could pick me up and bring the repair crew to put the damaged Beaver back into condition. Thus I spent three days in this underground.

¹ Partisan leader in a prewar canton.

The Chau Doan had requested three tons of rice to be parachuted for his partisans and their families. Therefore, on the afternoon of the drop I attended the recovery and distribution of the rice. The Chau Doan, set up in a hut with a scale, gave each person exactly what was coming to him. This distribution, which took a large part of the afternoon, was conducted in the most perfect tranquility and order. Then security arrangements were taken for the night, exactly as I would have taken them myself. For two days I rode on horseback throughout the region with the Chau Doan. I visited villages and established contact with the inhabitants, exactly as I had done 20 years earlier when, as a lieutenant fresh from the School, I commanded the Chi Ma post on the border between China and Tonkin.

It was in one of these villages that I learned, on 1 August, that I was going to be promoted to lieutenant-colonel.

The inhabitants peacefully tended to their occupations. Nothing suggested that the war was so close. The authority of the Chau Doan and the way in which he had reestablished order and tranquility in his canton fully demonstrated to me that, if there were still any need to convince me, maximum initiative in both the conduct of local operations and in the administration of their region should be left to the natives.

In the Muong Nhie region, 130 kilometers north of Bien Dien Phu, our wandering teams from Lai Chau had discovered a National Chinese colonel, Colonel Yen, who had been ensconced in the region since 1950 and whom no one had bothered, neither the Chinese nor the Viet Minh.

On 16 February the Command gave Hebert the mission of recovering him from Dien Bien Phu by helicopter, in order to take him to Hanoi.

"We are fighting the same enemy," he told us, "the communists. Give me some ammunition, that is all I ask of you, and some radio equipment to enter directly into contact with you. I put myself at your complete disposal."

With our agreement he extended his sector as far as Muong Boum to the east. Thus a new part of the China border, north of Dien Bien Phu, was blocked.

On 20 December the Viet Minh launched a large offensive in Central Laos in the direction of Takek. Rushing forward on poor paths through sparse forest, between 20-25 December, they routed our advance posts and the few battalions which were hastily set against them. On 26 December Viet Minh elements entered Takek. Elements taken from the Tonkin Delta were rapidly sent to Seno, a large airbase put into a state of defense.

This offensive was a total surprise about which we had practically no intelligence.

Then the GCMV requested all of the Laotian battalions to register the men and officers who were originally from the region crossed by the Viet Minh. About 40 men, most of them noncommissioned officers or corporals, were recovered in this way.

Lieutenant Vincendon took them to Cape Saint-Jacques and, in eight days, taught them to jump at night by parachute and to operate a 536 radio.

Then he dropped them in teams of two. All were volunteers and rejoined their villages without any incident. Every morning, in a Dakota and with an interpreter, Vincendon flew over the zone where he had scattered his Laotians and made contact with them. This was a valuable and unequalled source of intelligence, obtained rapidly and easy to use, especially by the Air Force.

From 5 to 9 January the Viets tried in vain to capture Seno; they were repulsed everywhere and Takek was reoccupied. In the last days of January, when the attack on Dien Bien Phu seemed imminent, the 308th left the arrangement encircling the basin and went at forced march to Luang Prabang. On the way it took and razed the posts of Muong Khoua and reached Nam Buc, halfway to Luang Prabang, and stopped in front of the Muong Sai post. The underground fighters of the Servan zone of Lieutenant Brehier, quartered at Nong Khang (Sergeant-Major Verniere), at Houei Thab (Sergeant-Major Chevillot), and at Pa Thi (Sergeant-Major Fritsch), received

the mission of going to harass the roads between Dien Bien Phu and Muong Sai with their Meo commandos. They set out across an extremely difficult region, but one where the people received them favorably and helped them. They did not have to intervene, because the 308th slowly retreated to Dien Bien Phu after having failed at Muong Sai.

On 3 March Hebert received at Dien Bien Phu four Meos, sent by the 2nd Bureau in Hanoi, whom he was asked to put down in a helicopter in the Ban Pho region, precisely the village of Pouseng, in the retreat zone of the 308th. He was to pick them up at the same village four days later. The four Meos were at the rendezvous, the dropping zone had been marked for them near the village. But this was a forest zone and the helicopter piloted by Warrant Officer Duteu could not reach the ground. The helicopter was observed and bullets rattled around it. The four Meos were rapidly hauled into the helicopter, which quickly ascended and took them back to the 2nd Bureau in Hanoi.

GCMIA-GMI in Indochina

The GMI activity developed throughout the Indochinese area with various fates.

1) Laos. Captain Marson, the chief of the Regional Representation of Laos, reestablished contact with all of the peoples of the northwest, particularly in the province of Ban Houei Sai and Muong Sing, without any difficulty. All of the local leaders had remained loyal to us. They did not understand why we had abandoned them. Most of the time it had been enough to rearm our former partisans, and sometimes simply to give them ammunition (since most had kept the weapons given to them by France before the war). Once the few Viet troops had been suppressed, all Viet Minh influence disappeared rapidly from the immense area.

The resources placed at the disposal of Laos allowed them to establish some antennas in the southern part of Laos at Pakse, at Saravanne and at Attapeu. Prince Bounoum de Champasac, whose fief it is, reserved the best of welcomes for them. Captain Jestin, in charge of the Attapeu region, went up the valleys of the Kanana, the Sibou, the Kong and its tributaries flowing from the Annamese chain. He performed real exploratory work, discovering tribes and still very primitive groups of people who had not yet had any contact with either Europeans or Annamese. He was well received everywhere.

An instruction center was set up at Khang Khay by Captain Sassi, intended particularly to train for each of the undergrounds established groups of underground fighters, and native commandos commanded by French noncommissioned officers, in order to increase their spread and their effectiveness.¹

¹ In Laos it is always necessary to anticipate a European command staff to make the underground fighters effective.

These efforts were particularly applied in the region of Sam Neua to consolidate the Servan zone (Lt. Brehier) and to protect, by means of an entire underground zone, the zone north of Xieng Khouang to guarantee protection of the entrenched camp in the Plaine des Jarres -

2) Central Vietnam and the South Vietnam Plateau. The operations of the landing commandos, supported by the Navy or using their own resources, were conducted continually from the Island of Cu Lao Re, particularly by Captain Leger.

I shall only mention one particular case of success, initiated on the intelligence of a GMI agent deposited on the shore several days before. This intelligence was as follows: Every week on the night between Saturday and Sunday there was a meeting of the Viet staffs in the region in the People's House in an inland village on the border of the Quang Ngai River, about 6 kilometers from its mouth.

Captain Leger decided to make a commando raid on this village, to destroy the People's House, and to capture the Viet Minh staffs.

A National Navy patrol boat, anchored off Cu Lao Re, was responsible for radar control of the pinnaces and for covering reloading with fire from its weapons. The commando team participating in the operation consisted of 20 men, divided into two groups of ten men each and loaded on two armed pinnaces equipped with radar sights. Two Zodiacs, capable of holding ten men, were on board the pinnaces.

They set out late in the afternoon. Navigation and contact for final control took place in the evening with the patrol boat off Cape Batagan.

After night had fallen the two pinnaces entered the mouth of the river with engines idling and ascended it, guided by the patrol boat radio which, on its radar screen, monitored their route among the rocks strewn the Quang Ngai bed. The approach was favored by a very dark night. About 10:00 p.m. the pinnaces dropped anchor about 30 meters from the bank, and the Zodiac's were put into the

water. The commandos embarked, paddled away and debarked 500 meters upstream from the village.

One group for protection remained in place while the other entered the road. At the edge of the village two sentinels, deceived by the commando outfit of the men and conversation in Vietnamese, were silently done away with. The People's House was rapidly spotted and attacked. Nine staff members, including the political commissar and the commanding officer of the Viet unit stationed in the village, were killed.

A camouflaged charge of five kilograms of gelatin explosives with a ten-minute fuse was placed in the House. The Viet reaction was immediate and very violent. One man of the commando was slightly wounded. The retreat was made by running to the Zodiak, after having booby-trapped the road. The commandos embarked immediately. The gelatin explosive charge and the boobytraps exploded. The pinanaces opened fire on the bank with a 57 recoilless piece, and with a 13.2 machinegun, and headed back, still guided by the patrol boat.

Later intelligence revealed to Captain Leger that the explosion of the gelatin charge had caused heavy losses to the Viets who had rushed to defend the People's House.

3) The South Vietnam Plateaus. The Regional Representation was very active in the form of harassing raids, ambushes and mine-laying on the Viet communication routes.

Wandering groups operated deeper and deeper in the Hre country and carried out intensive political activity there. Thanks to Captain Hantic, the Hres rallied to our side. From the beginning of 1951 Hantic had dealt seriously with them, and had been adopted by them as their real chief. Sympathizers and fellow-workers multiplied in their vicinity. Activities in the Die country expanded like a drop of oil. This cooperation allowed small teams, trained by Lt. Thebault, to make deep

and sometimes long-lasting raids in all of the rear areas. These were the teams which prepared the airstrip for the Qui Non debarcation on 29 January 1952, who served as guides for the troops and who guaranteed their security in depth.

To facilitate commando raids in the interior, to better assure communication with the tribes loyal to us, and to increase their spread, I decided to unite these two Regional Representations and to place them under the command of Major Darchy, whose command post was at Tourane. This union permitted all of our commandos to participate actively in the Atlante operation begun on 20 January in the LKV (expansion unknown).

As in other Regional Representations, Major Darchy created a training center under the direction of Lt. Thebault, particularly inclined toward the training of small commandos capable of making raids in the interior.

4) South Vietnam. The Regional Representation of South Vietnam under the direction of Captain Conill actively pursued political and military infiltration. It succeeded in infiltrating the Viet Minh zones of the most difficult access by many agents who informed us perfectly of their activities. Unfortunately the small numbers of men available in South Vietnam did not always permit this intelligence to be used. The activity of Major Savani, conducted in very close collaboration with the chief of the 2nd Bureau in Saigon, is of particular interest. We shall speak of it in more detail at the end of this work.

5) Cambodia. Cambodia was a relatively tranquil region. Therefore no region was inaccessible to our troops. Taking advantage of this situation the young king of Cambodia, although very friendly toward the French and France, but of a very changeable nature, demanded immediate and total independence of his country despite the war and the general situation in Indochina. On 13 June 1953, in order to force France's hand, he left for Siam in exile. Not finding the welcome he expected, he returned to Phnom Penh after a few days' absence. His collaboration

was always tasty from that date on. Under these conditions it was impossible for the GCMA, and later for the GMI, to undertake any action at all there.

6) North Vietnam. The antennas initially installed at the edge of the Tonkin Delta, which had not been spoken of much, had not remained inactive at all. Their activity had been less noticeable and less spectacular than the activity of the large undergrounds in Laos and the High Region. However, it had been very effective. Modifications had been made in the implantation of some of them, so that their activities coincided better with the general operations plan.

The antenna of Tien Yen came under the direct command of the Colonel Commanding the coastal zone: the Potiron underground, formed with Mans in the Hoang-Mo region, had 100 weapons.

The Ibiscus underground in the Bin Lieu region included elements grouped in the zone around Khelac with 200 weapons; in the Bac Long region there were 30 weapons, all in the hands of Mans and Thos. These undergrounds guaranteed a great deal of security in the northern part of the coastal zone.

For this reason the Tien Yen antenna continued its extension toward the north and took in the sector of the Pho Ba Che antenna.

The Pho Ba Che antenna was moved to Luc Nam. It received the mission of working in the Auvergne zone, i.e., the region of Din Lap, Loc Binh, and Lang Son. Actually this post gave it more opportunities to spread out its Special Missions.

The Phuc Yen antenna had a very difficult mission because of the density of the Viet Minh occupation in this region. Its leader, Lt. Borcard, nevertheless succeeded in installing a 694 radiopost on RP 41, handled by two girls. They are the ones who were the first to indicate the movement of 105 mm pieces in the direction of Dien Bien Phu in December 1953. He also succeeded in introducing agents up to Phuto, who provided excellent intelligence, and detached elements to Son Tay, who infiltrated in the direction of the Black River.

The Ha Dong antenna investigated the Muong country south of Hoa Binh. It succeeded in installing a small underground, the Tabac underground, which had to be abandoned after a serious attack at the beginning of its installation.

It thrust Special Missions as far as Kana Bong and Hoixang in the Red Thai country east of Than Hoa. An important underground was able to be established in this region, the Sangsue underground. It rapidly had 200 weapons available and established communication with the Servan zone in Laos (Sam Neua). This underground would serve as the point of departure for agents into Than Hoa. But Than Hoa, populated by Annamese whom the Viets had thoroughly organized, would always be a very difficult field, except for the Catholic villages which would shelter our agents and serve as relays for them whenever it was possible.

The antenna, installed on the Hong Me Island with Captain Bichelot, trained personnel to mount small operations with the Navy or with their own resources, in particular to set down or pick up Special Missions on specific points along the coast.

Its attempts to make connections with the Sangsue underground by means of Than Hoa did not produce any appreciable result, in spite of the good qualities of the agents used.

Plan of Action for 1954

Summing up, during the second half of 1953 the GMI manpower rose from 5,000 to 14,000. However, its financial resources were scarcely increased, and its European command staff diminished. On 1 January the shortages were as follows: ten officers, 24 noncommissioned officers, 64 corporals, senior corporals or soldiers.

This situation became even more aggravated after 1 December 1973 by the union of EMO with TAPI. In this way the GMI lost the cooperation of a significant number of officers and noncommissioned officers who would have dedicated some of their activity for its benefit.

This situation could not be prolonged indefinitely, from the viewpoint of both credit and personnel.

The people in our undergrounds were more and more demanding. Enthusiasm dwindled, because it is difficult to wage war and to work a rice field at the same time.

To guarantee the maintenance and development of essential missions the GMI Commander, lacking firm support from Command, was obliged to accede to fruitless finagling, which attracted definite animosity and did not facilitate the mission for them.

In addition, during the operational period, all of the resources were taken forward, while the training centers and the staffs were left empty.

If the current GMI resources were not rapidly readjusted, it would be necessary to prepare a plan for progressive regression in order not to abandon under poor conditions the people who had served us well up to that time. This was the situation which I explained to General Navarre in a long report.

For the most part General Navarre gave us satisfaction.

Therefore it was possible for me to present a widespread program to him for 1954.

In the spring of 1953 General Alessandri had told us:

"Next year your undergrounds must be developed well enough that they can reoccupy without difficulty all of the High Region. In short you must be General Navarre's artillery preparing the terrain to permit easy occupation."

We knew that all of the mountaineers, from Tonkin, Laos and Central Vietnam, hated the Viets, who treated them without any respect, like criminals, and used them as coolies for their roughest work. They had to be contacted, organized, and given the resources and chance to defend themselves, so that we could have them on our side and arouse them against the Viets occupying their country.

Therefore this was long-term work which required time, large resources and a great deal of experience.

We had the resources and the experience. Therefore it was only a question of time.

Thus at the beginning of 1954 I presented to General Navarre a broad program which we could systematically achieve during the year.

At Tonkin we proposed to cross the Red River in a large swathe between Lao Kay and Yen Bay.

We knew that Hung, Luong and Seco Thin, who firmly held underground fighters from the Cardamone zone, were burning with enthusiasm to cross the Red River to return to their native countries, where they had maintained contact and where they were certain of being well received.

But the hopes which the previous year had seen give birth to the Chocolat underground with Cho Quang Lo, inspired us with the strictest prudence. In order not to be overrun by the Viets, simultaneous action had to take place across a very wide zone.